

**UPDATE OF PREVIOUS BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE REPORT FOR A
DRAINAGE ON PARCEL 017-113-030 NEAR CALLE CESAR CHAVEZ**

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Prepared for:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the City of Santa Barbara (City) retained URS Corporation (URS) to investigate the biological resources and wetland-related regulatory constraints of a portion of a drainage on a parcel adjacent to Calle Cesar Chavez (Figure 1, Appendix A). The drainage represented a man-made ditch excavated on dry land in the area of the historic El Estero tidal wetlands that once occupied a large portion of the waterfront area. The drainage is called El Estero Drain, extending approximately 1,600 feet from the subject parcel to its confluence with Laguna Channel near the City's wastewater treatment plant. URS prepared a biological resource report dated June 2000 that focused on the occurrence of wetlands at the project site (see original report in Appendix C).

This report provides an update of the biological resources and regulatory constraints of the subject parcel for use by the Redevelopment Agency in its current planning studies. In addition, this report includes information about soils and drainage patterns at the project site that was not included in the 2000 report.

Dr. John Gray conducted the field investigations for both the 2000 and 2006 reports.

In 2000, there were four small patches of saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) on the flat area south of the drain in the Union Pacific right-of-way. These patches are rooted in dry, barren areas where there has been considerable disturbance from dumping and clearing. The combined area of the patches was about 73 square feet.

There is no evidence that any special interest fish or wildlife species occur in the drainage upstream of the Calle Cesar Chavez Road. The entire El Estero Drain does not support fish because there is no continuous connection with Laguna Channel, and because the water in the drain is stagnant, or poor quality, and clogged with vegetation. Hence, the endangered southern steelhead and tidewater goby, which are present along the South Coast, are not expected to occur at the subject parcel. Habitat in the drain is also not suitable for the endangered California red-legged frog because of the reasons noted above for native fish.

However, it should be noted that portions of El Estero Drain downstream of Calle Cesar Chavez support a population of the locally sensitive southwestern pond turtle. These areas contain patches of open water with overhanging vegetation. This type of habitat is not present in the project reach which has very little open water habitat. Hence, this species is not expected to be present at the project site, and was not observed during 2000 field surveys. Finally, the narrow and small bulrush thicket in the project reach is not suitable for breeding by riparian birds, shorebirds, or waterfowl.

In 2000, we concluded the following:

- Wetlands, as defined by the Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and as defined by the Coastal Act, are present in the bottom of the drainage and on the lower 1.5 feet of the banks because the channel bottom has year-round ponded water and is dominated by hydrophytic plants.
- The four saltgrass patches on the flat areas above the drainage do not represent Corps or Coastal Act wetlands due to the clear lack of wetland hydrology.
- The drain at the subject parcel does not exhibit the characteristics of an environmentally sensitive habitat area (ESHA) as defined in the Coastal Act and clarified in the Coastal Commission's *1981 Statewide Interpretive Guidelines for Wetlands and Other Wet Environmental Sensitive Habitat Area*.
- Development at or near the drainage will require a consideration of a buffer zone. The wetlands in the drain exhibit negligible functions and values, and furthermore, do not exhibit characteristics of an ESHA. As a result of this condition, a relatively narrow buffer zone may be appropriate. The width of the buffer zone is ultimately dependent upon the City Planning Division staff and Planning Commission. However, because the wetlands in the project reach have very low quality relative to other coastal wetlands in Santa Barbara County, a minimal width buffer zone should be applied, such as 25 feet (Figure 6, Appendix A).

3. CURRENT CONDITIONS – YEAR 2006

In January 2006, URS conducted a second field survey of the project site to determine if there had been any substantial change in physical and biological conditions at the site. A summary of our observations is provided below. Site photographs are provided in Appendix B, and a vegetation map is presented on Figure 4 (Appendix A).

The configuration and dimensions of the channel have not changed in the past six years. The bottom of the channel is still dominated by California bulrush. Plant density and height were greater in 2006 compared to 2000 because the earlier survey was conducted after a vegetation thinning event. It did not appear that water was present in the channel during the 2006 survey. The arch culvert at Calle Cesar Chavez has become overgrown with dense vegetation and sediment, so that the height from the channel bed to the ceiling of the culvert is not more than three feet.

The lower banks have a few scattered palms, castor bean, and pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) which were not present or dominant in 2000. The upper banks of the drain contain mostly weeds and non-native grasses. Weeds on the upper banks include castor bean, pampas grass, fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and English plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). Non-native grasses on the upper banks include Bermuda grass, ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), red brome (*Bromus madritensis*), kikuyu grass (*Pennisetum clandestinum*), and smilo grass (*Piptatherum millaceum*). In general, the cover and diversity of non-native weeds have increased over the past six years.

There are a few patches of native species at the parcel, including one arroyo willow tree (*Salix lasiolepis*) about 12 feet tall on the north bank; this tree has grown about one foot per year since 2000. Other native plants include coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*) on the north side of the drain, and saltgrass and western ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*) on the south side.

The four small patches of saltgrass observed in 2000 on the flat area south of the drain are still present, although they do not appear to be healthy.

The flats on the south side of the drain are mostly barren with scattered gravels and a few weeds including seedlings of castor bean and a few small patches of Bermuda grass. This area is within the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way and is purposely cleared of weeds by hand and herbicide treatment. The top of the northern bank at the western half is mostly concrete with scattered patches of weeds including Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor*), smilo grass, white sweet clover (*Melilotus alba*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), fennel, and common sow thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*). This area is now fenced and vacant.

Trash and a homeless encampment were also present in the drainage during the 2006 survey.

The soils at the project site represent modern fill (Aquents, or AC). This portion of the City was once a large salt marsh ("El Estero"), and was reclaimed by importing and dumping fill soils

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

There have been no significant changes in the physical and biological conditions of the drainage and adjacent areas at the subject parcel since the previous study. Our conclusions related to wetlands and regulatory constraints that are summarized above and presented in detail in the June 2000 report (*Evaluation of Wetland Status and Regulatory Constraints, El Estero Drain at Calle Cesar Chavez*) remain valid and applicable.

APPENDIX A

Figures 1-6

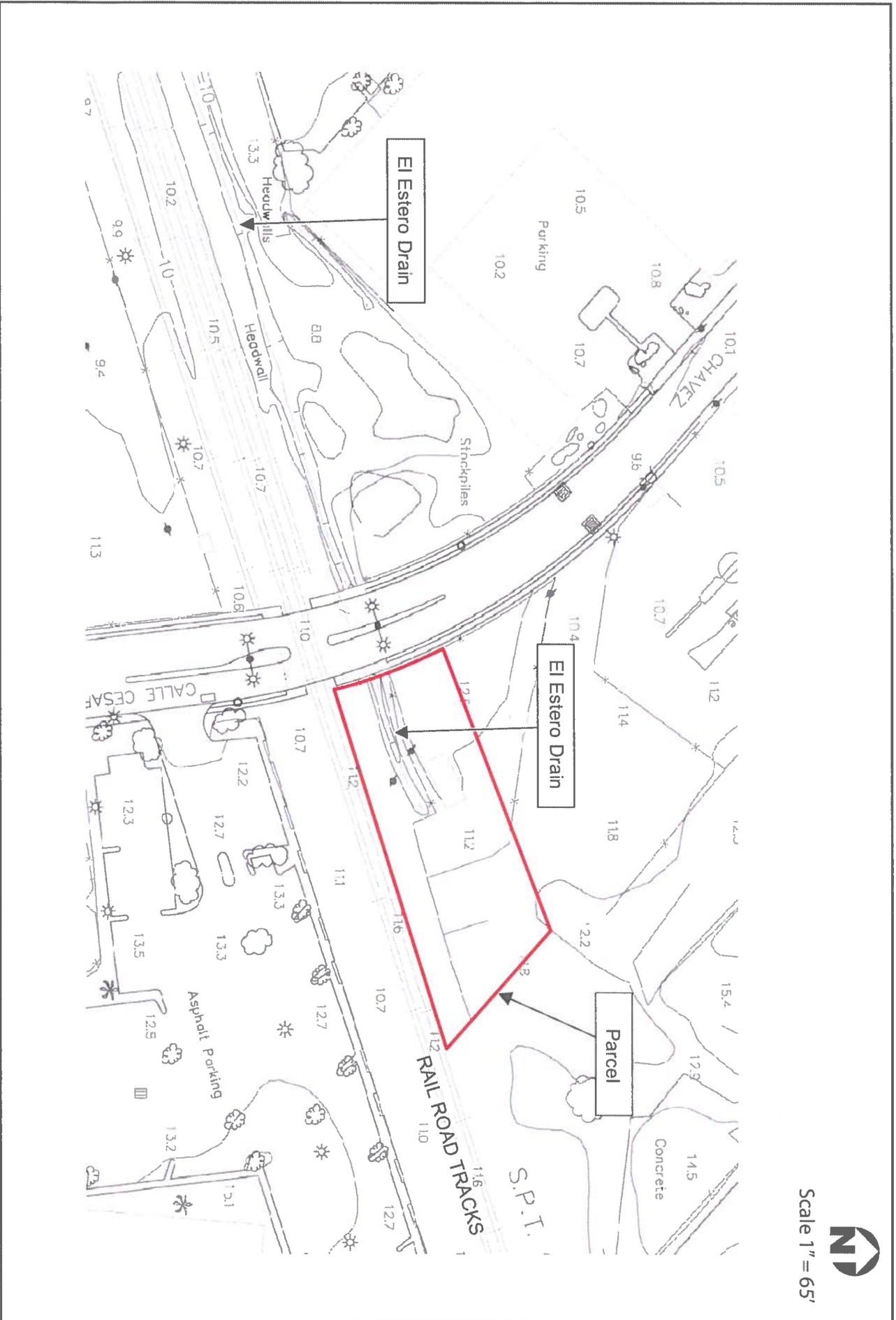


Figure 1. Location of Project Site

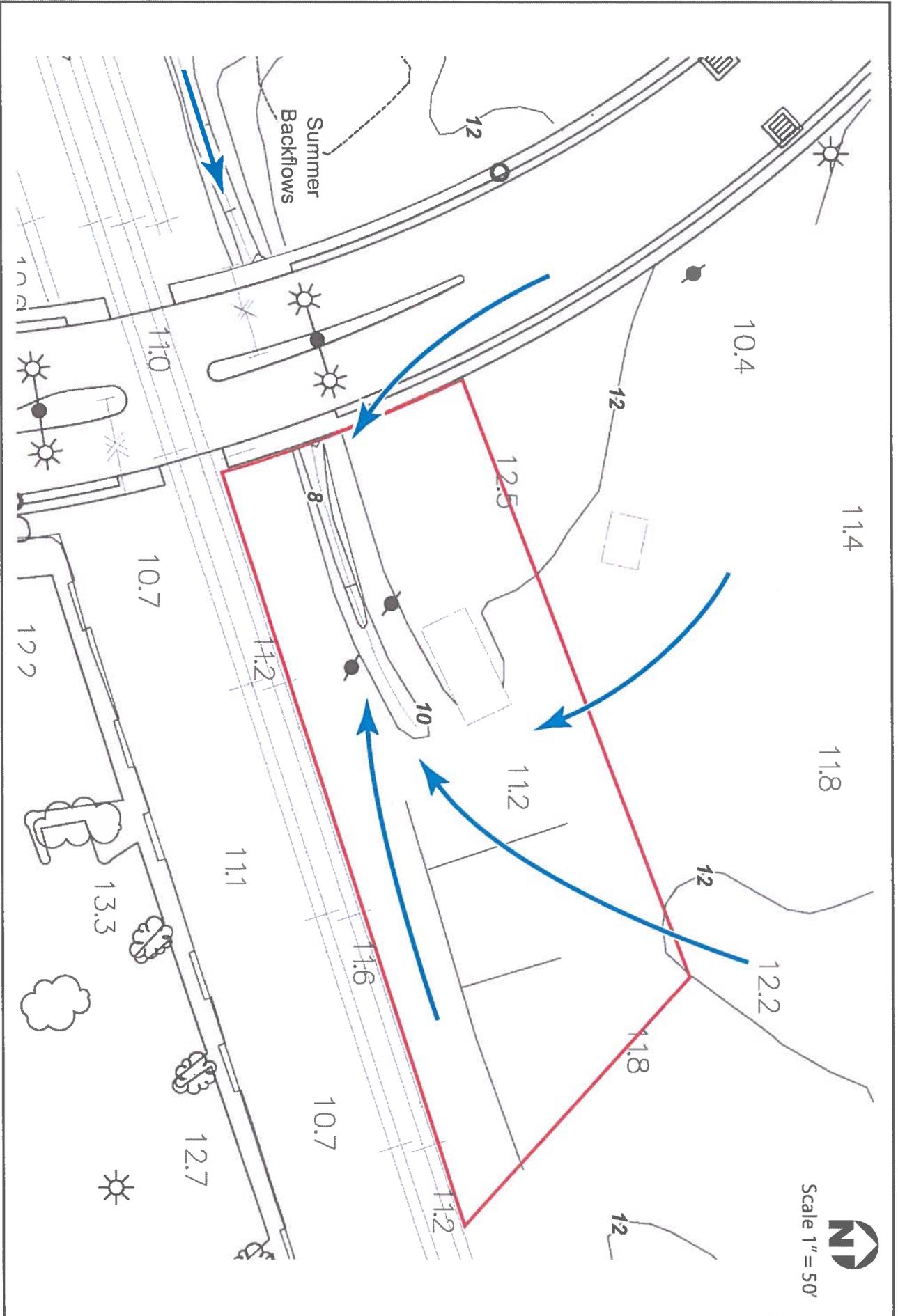
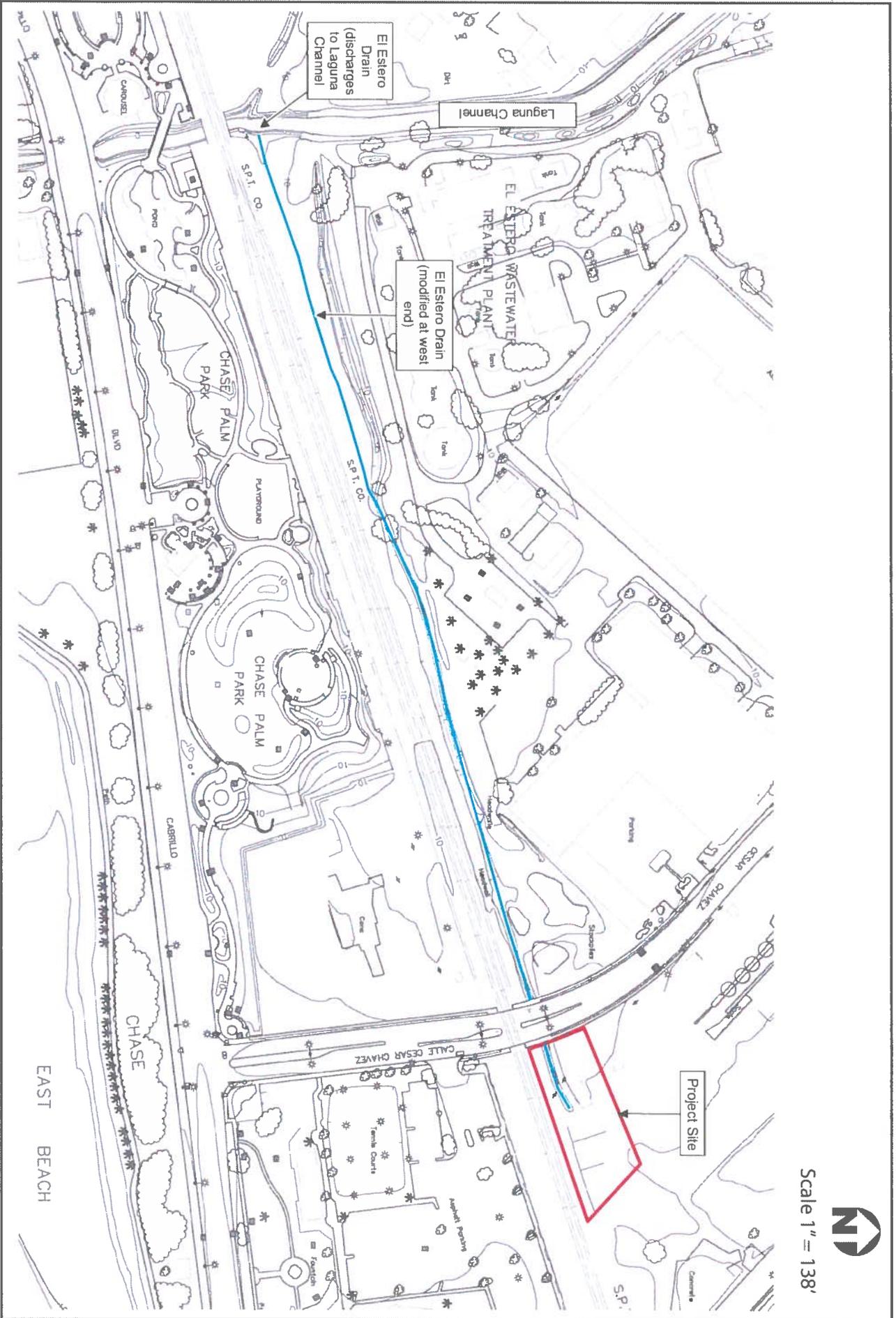


Figure 2. Local Drainage



Scale 1" = 138'

Figure 3. El Estero Drain

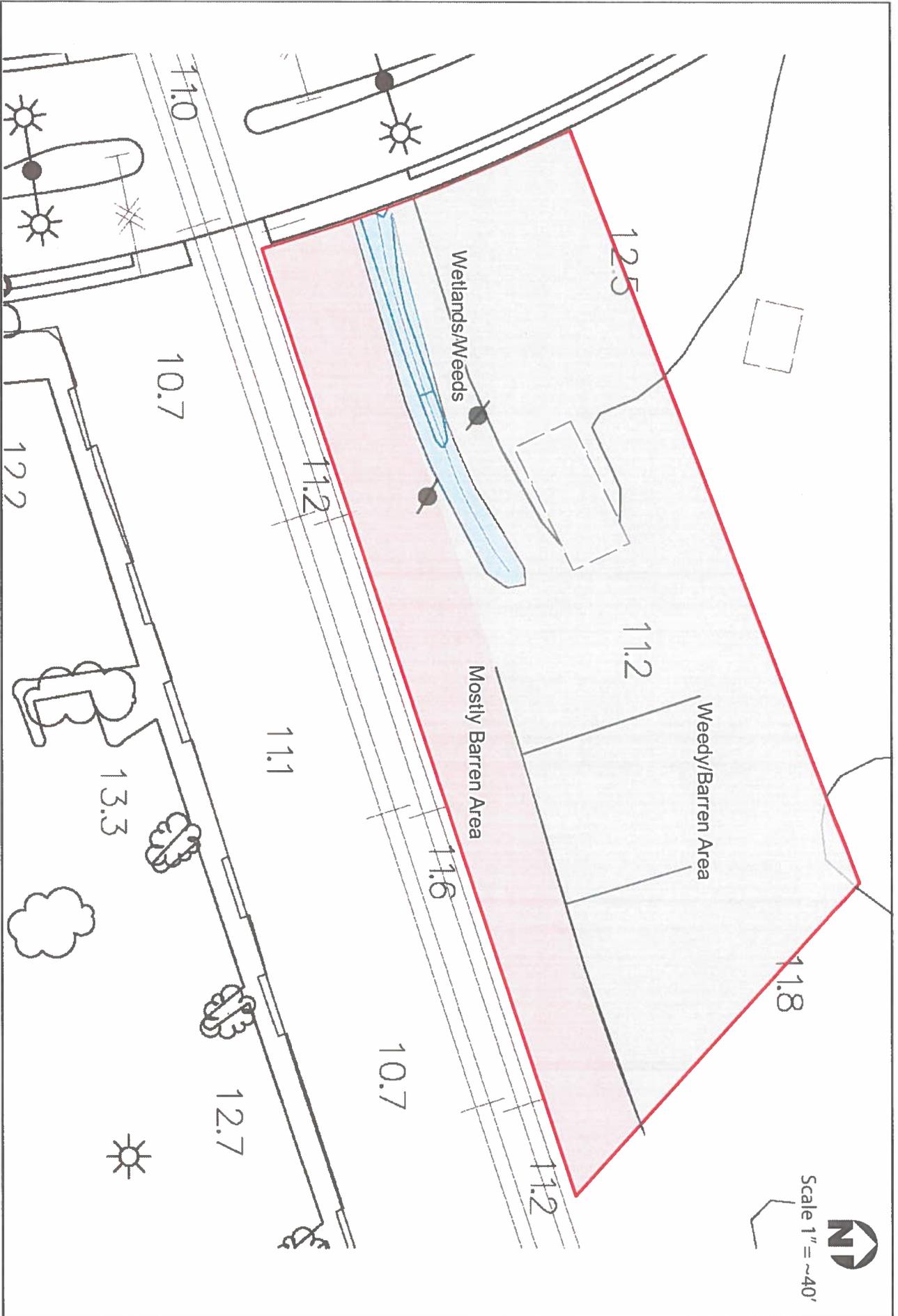


Figure 4. Vegetation at the Project Site

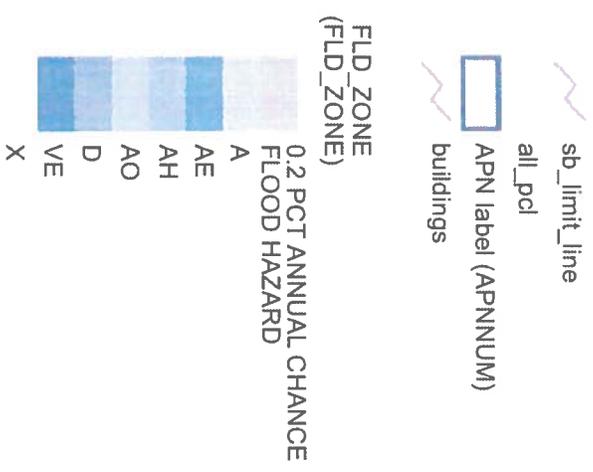
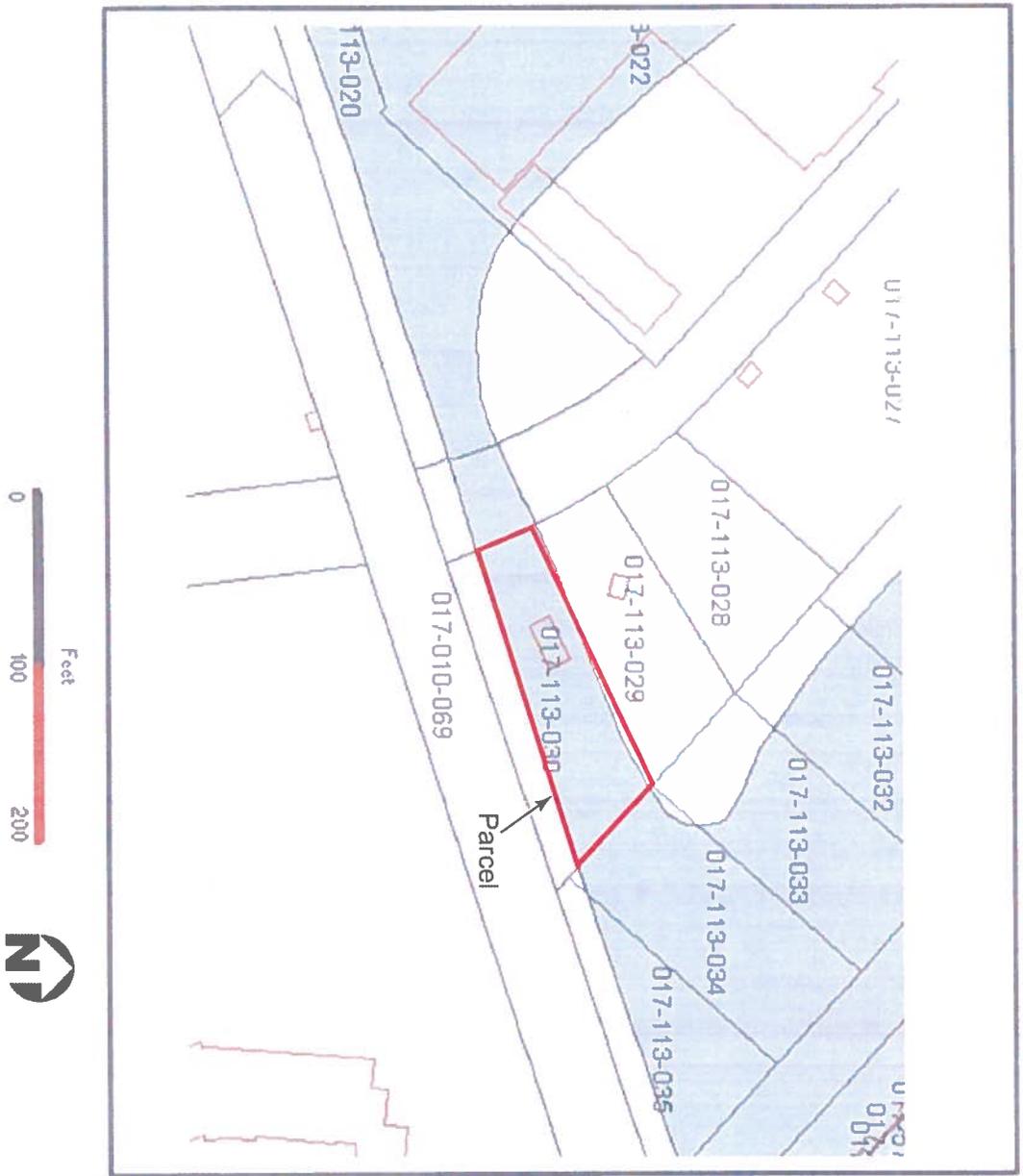


Figure 5. 500-Year flood Hazard Map

APPENDIX B

Site Photographs



Photograph No. 1 View of drainage ditch on other side of the Union Pacific railroad lines. View to the north.



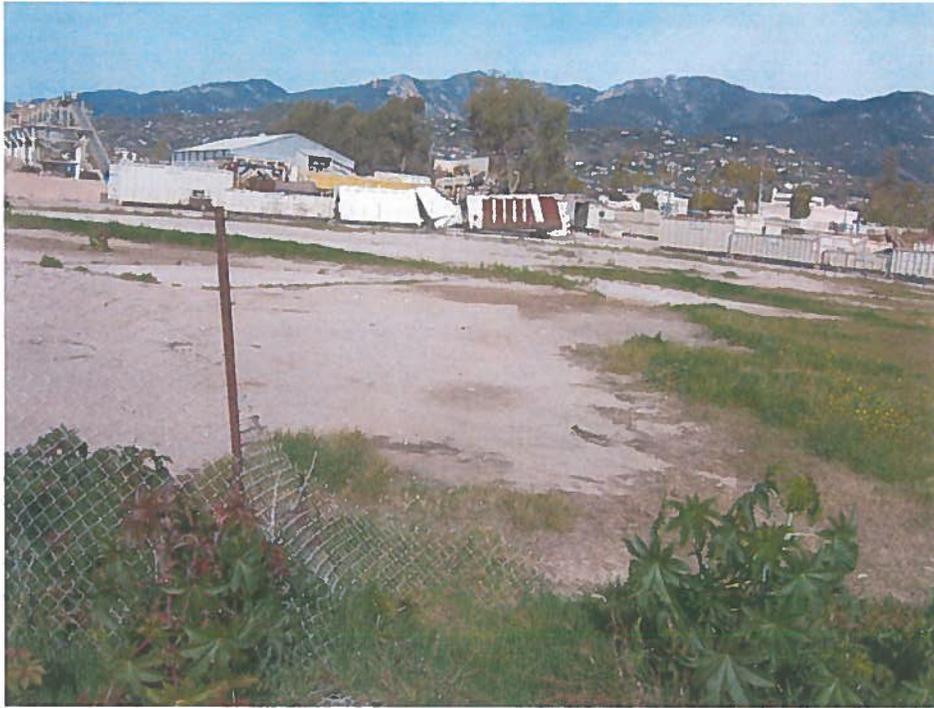
Photograph No. 2 View of the concrete box culvert over Calle Cesar Chavez. View to the west. Note that box culvert is blocked by dense vegetation.



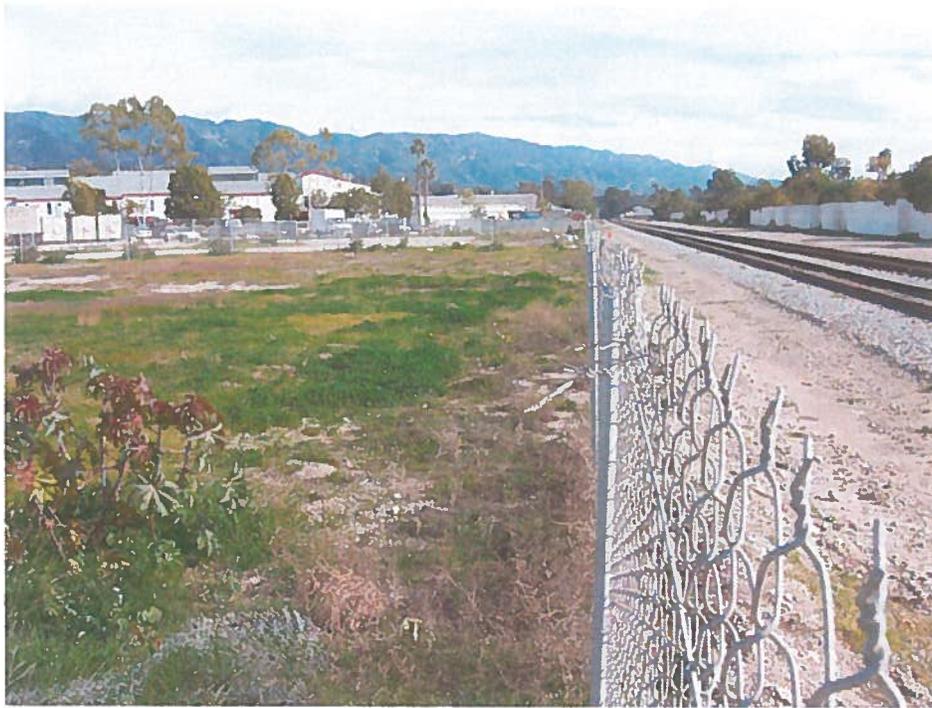
**Photograph No. 3. View of the drainage ditch to the east.
Railroad tracks to the right.**



**Photograph No. 4. View of drainage ditch to the east. Vegetation in
ditch is dense with mostly bulrush in the bottom with castor bean,
palms, saltgrass, and non-native grasses on the top of the banks.**



Photograph No. 5. View from the east end of drainage ditch facing northwest. Note the area is mostly concrete with some scattered weeds.



Photograph No. 6. View from east end of drainage ditch facing east along the fence line. Note the area consists of weeds and non-native grasses.



Photograph No. 7. View from east end of drainage facing northeast.



Photograph No. 8. View of saltgrass patch No. 1. Note saltgrass is scattered among non-native grasses.



Photograph No. 9. View of saltgrass patch No. 2.



Photograph No. 10. View of saltgrass patch No. 3 and 4.

APPENDIX C

2000 Biology Report